

## PERIOD 2: c. 1648 to c. 1815

**Key Concept 2.1.** Different models of political sovereignty affected the relationship among states and between states and individuals.

Between 1648 and 1815, the sovereign state was consolidated as the principal form of political organization across Europe. Justified and rationalized by theories of political sovereignty, states adopted a variety of methods to acquire the human, fiscal, and material resources essential for the promotion of their interests. Although challenged and sometimes effectively resisted by various social groups and institutions, the typical state of the period, best exemplified by the rule of Louis XIV in France, asserted claims to absolute authority within its borders. A few states, most notably England and the Dutch Republic, gradually developed governments in which the authority of the executive was restricted by legislative bodies protecting the interests of the landowning and commercial classes.

Between the Peace of Westphalia (1648) and the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815), European states managed their external affairs within a balance of power system. In this system, diplomacy became a major component of the relations among states. Most of the wars of the period, including conflicts fought outside of Europe, stemmed from attempts either to preserve or disturb the balance of power among European states. While European monarchs continued to view their affairs in dynastic terms, increasingly, reasons of state influenced policy.

The French Revolution was the most formidable challenge to traditional politics and diplomacy during this period. Inspired in part by Enlightenment ideas, the revolution introduced mass politics, led to the creation of numerous political and social ideologies, and remained the touchstone for those advocating radical reform in subsequent decades. The French Revolution was part of a larger revolutionary impulse that, as a transatlantic movement, influenced revolutions in Spanish America and the Haitian slave revolt. Napoleon Bonaparte built upon the gains of the revolution and attempted to exploit the resources of the continent in the interests of France and his own dynasty. Napoleon's revolutionary state imposed French hegemony throughout Europe, but eventually a coalition of European powers overthrew French domination and restored, as much as possible, a balance of power within the European state system. At the same time, the conservative powers attempted to suppress the ideologies inspired by the French Revolution.

**Key Concept 2.2.** The expansion of European commerce accelerated the growth of a worldwide economic network.

The economic watershed of the 17th and 18th centuries was a historically unique passage from limited resources that made material want inescapable to self-generating economic growth that dramatically raised levels of physical and material well-being. European societies — first those with access to the Atlantic and gradually those to the east and on the Mediterranean — provided increasing percentages of their populations with a higher standard of living.

The gradual emergence of new economic structures that made European global influence possible both presupposed and promoted far-reaching changes in human capital, property rights, financial instruments, technologies, and labor systems. These changes included:

- ▶ Availability of labor power, both in terms of numbers and in terms of persons with the skills (literacy, ability to understand and manipulate the natural world, physical health sufficient for work) required for efficient production
- ▶ Institutions and practices that supported economic activity and provided incentives for it (new definitions of property rights and protections for them against theft or confiscation and against state taxation)
- ▶ Accumulations of capital for financing enterprises and innovations, as well as for raising the standard of living and the means for turning private savings into investable or “venture” capital
- ▶ Technological innovations in food production, transportation, communication, and manufacturing

A major result of these changes was the development of a growing consumer society that benefited from and contributed to the increase in material resources. At the same time, other effects of the economic revolution — increased geographic mobility, transformed employer–worker relations, the decline of domestic manufacturing — eroded traditional community and family solidarities and protections.

European economic strength derived in part from the ability to control and exploit resources (human and material) around the globe. Mercantilism supported the development of European trade and influence around the world. However, the economic, social, demographic, and ecological effects of European exploitation on other regions were often devastating. Internally, Europe divided more and more sharply between the societies engaging in overseas trade and undergoing the economic transformations sketched above (primarily countries on the Atlantic) and those (primarily in central and eastern Europe) with little such involvement. The eastern European countries remained in a traditional, principally agrarian, economy and maintained the traditional order of society and the state that rested on it.

**Key Concept 2.3.** The popularization and dissemination of the Scientific Revolution and the application of its methods to political, social, and ethical issues led to an increased, although not unchallenged, emphasis on reason in European culture.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, Europeans applied the methods of the new science — such as empiricism, mathematics, and skepticism — to human affairs. During the Enlightenment, intellectuals such as Rousseau, Voltaire, and Diderot aimed to replace faith in divine revelation with faith in human reason and classical values. In economics and politics, liberal theorists such as John Locke and Adam Smith questioned absolutism and mercantilism by arguing for the authority of natural law and the market. Belief in progress, along with improved social and economic conditions, spurred significant gains in literacy and education as well as the creation of a new culture of the printed word, including novels, newspapers, periodicals, and such reference works as Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, for a growing educated audience.

Several movements of religious revival occurred during the 18th century, but elite culture embraced skepticism, secularism, and atheism for the first time in European history, and popular attitudes began to move in the same directions. From the beginning of this period, Protestants and Catholics grudgingly tolerated each other following the religious warfare of the previous two centuries. By 1800, most governments had extended toleration to Christian minorities and in some states even to Jews. Religion was viewed increasingly as a matter of private rather than public concern.

The new rationalism did not sweep all before it; in fact, it coexisted with a revival of sentimentalism and emotionalism. Until about 1750, Baroque art and music glorified religious feeling and drama as well as the grandiose pretensions of absolute monarchs. During the French Revolution, romanticism and nationalism implicitly challenged what some saw as the Enlightenment's overemphasis on reason. These Counter-Enlightenment views laid the foundations for new cultural and political values in the 19th century. Overall, intellectual and cultural developments during this period marked a transition in European history to a modern worldview in which rationalism, skepticism, scientific investigation, and a belief in progress generally dominated, although such views did not completely overwhelm other worldviews stemming from religion, nationalism, and romanticism.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR 2.3.VI**

**OS-7** Analyze how and to what extent the Enlightenment encouraged Europeans to understand human behavior, economic activity, and politics as governed by natural laws.

**OS-10** Analyze the means by which individualism, subjectivity, and emotion came to be considered a valid source of knowledge.

**OS-12** Analyze how artists used strong emotions to express individuality and political theorists encouraged emotional identification with the nation.

**VI. While Enlightenment values dominated the world of European ideas, they were challenged by the revival of public sentiment and feeling.**

A. Rousseau questioned the exclusive reliance on reason and emphasized the role of emotions in the moral improvement of self and society.

B. Revolution, war, and rebellion demonstrated the emotional power of mass politics and nationalism.

C. Romanticism emerged as a challenge to Enlightenment rationality.

**Key Concept 2.4.** The experiences of everyday life were shaped by demographic, environmental, medical, and technological changes.

The legacies of the 16th-century population explosion, which roughly doubled the European population, were social disruptions and demographic disasters that persisted into the 18th century. Volatile weather in the 17th century harmed agricultural production. In some localities, recurring food shortages caused undernourishment that combined with disease to produce periodic spikes in mortality. By the 17th century, the European marriage pattern, which limited family size, became the most important check on population levels, although some couples also adopted birth control practices to limit family size. By the middle of the 18th century, better weather, improvements in transportation, new crops and agricultural practices, less epidemic disease, and advances in medicine and hygiene allowed much of Europe to escape from the cycle of famines that had caused repeated demographic disaster. By the end of the 18th century, reductions in child mortality and increases in life expectancy constituted the demographic underpinnings of new attitudes toward children and families.

Particularly in western Europe, the demographic revolution, along with the rise in prosperity, produced advances in material well-being that did not stop with the economic: Greater prosperity was associated with increasing literacy, education, and rich cultural lives (the growth of publishing and libraries, the founding of schools, and the establishment of orchestras, theaters, and museums). By the end of the 18th century, it was evident that a high proportion of Europeans were better fed, healthier, longer lived, and more secure and comfortable in their material well-being than at any previous time in human history. This relative prosperity was balanced by increasing numbers of the poor throughout Europe, who strained charitable resources and alarmed government officials and local communities.